

# Nidanavaggasamyutta (SN#51) - Thorough Investigation

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Introductory note:

This discourse demonstrates for us the Buddha's system of practicing "***a thorough investigation***" ***during meditation*** while attempting to discover this truth of what is real by examining the Impersonal Process of Dependent Origination, link by link. As you read this, you will observe the several linking parts of the process up close and their interconnectedness. You may recognize several of these links in particular as being part of what you have observed within your meditation. These would include your **six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, and sometimes even being** in a moment to moment context as you observe. The reading of the full version of this sutta often helps a person to grasp the series of links in this process more clearly and to understand what happens if one lets a feeling go as it arises. By learning to identify these links and realizing that this process is very impersonal you are can come to understand the root point of suffering. The process itself is a very applicable teaching which can then be observed with any arising phenomena at any sense door at any time using this new knowledge and sharpened awareness. After practicing releasing what arises for some time, noticing the arising and passing away, then tranquilizing the mind and body following the release, one's mind begins to behave with a new habitual tendency to let go of that which was so bothersome in the past, that which caused stress, beginning with subtle tension, then worry, fear, hate, restlessness etc.

Eventually, one reaches a place of changing perspective gradually seeing "what is actually real". One sees feeling as just feeling and let's go of any idea of attachment or aversion to it. As we tranquilize our minds and bodies more and more, we discover a true personality change begins to take place. It is through this change we begin to become disengaged, and then disenchanting with the tensions of attachment and aversion thus finding more equanimity and balance in our lives. This is a change for the better! It is a change leading us towards real tranquility and balance. WE are now beginning to see more clearly HOW things truly work and how what is going on is not a part of a self at all but, is, in fact, a very impersonal process. This is genuine relief! It results in less stress, increased patience and more contentment in life.

The sutta also demonstrates the four noble truths within the three paragraph structure of each link defining the suffering component, it's origin, it's cessation and showing the path to the cessation.

Bhante Vimalaramsi has taken out the ditto marks in this translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi so that it can be a more useful tool in your practice as you read it through. So please do read it, many times if you like, until it all becomes

clear.

May you all reach Nibbana quickly and easily in this very lifetime.

KK

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Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center

Annapolis, MO

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## Thorough Investigation

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The Connected Discourses of the Buddha - Samyutta Nikaya -

Part II: The Book of Causation - Nidanavagga

Chapter I, 12 Connected Discourses on Causation - Nidanasamyutta

VI Suffering (or The Tree)

51 (1) Thorough Investigation

(Page 586 in The Connected Discourses of the Buddha)<sup>1</sup>

### Thorough Investigation

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Savatthi in Jeta's grove, Anathapindika's Park. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus!"

"Venerable sir!" those bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is making a thorough investigation, in what way should he thoroughly investigate for the utterly complete destruction of suffering?"

"Venerable sir, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, take recourse in the Blessed One. It would be good if the Blessed One would clear up the meaning of this statement. Having heard it from him, the bhikkhus will remember it."

"Then listen and attend closely, bhikkhus, I will speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," the bhikkhus replied.

The Blessed One said this:

"Here, bhikkhus, when he makes a thorough investigation, a bhikkhu thoroughly investigates thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] aging-and-death: what is the source of this suffering, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does aging-and-death come to be? When what does not exist does aging-and-death not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: '***The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] aging-and-death***: this suffering has birth as its source, birth as its origin; it is born and produced from birth. When there is birth, aging-and-death comes to be; when there is no birth, aging-and-death does not come to be.'

"He understands aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of aging-and-death.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '***What is the source of this birth***, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does birth come to be? When what does not exist does birth not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] birth: this suffering has existence as its source, existence as its origin; it is born and produced from existence. When there is existence, birth comes to be; when there is no existence,

birth does not come to be.'

"He understands birth, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of birth.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of this existence**, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does existence come to be? When what does not exist does existence not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] existence: this suffering has clinging as its source, clinging as its origin; it is born and produced from clinging. When there is clinging, existence comes to be; when there is no clinging, existence does not come to be.'

"He understands existence, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of existence.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of this clinging**, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does clinging come to be? When what does not exist does clinging not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] clinging: this suffering has craving as its source, craving as its origin; it is born and produced from craving. When there is craving, clinging comes to be; when there is no craving, clinging does not come to be.'

"He understands clinging, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of clinging.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of this craving**, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does craving come to be? When what does not exist does craving not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] craving: this suffering has feeling as its source, feeling as its origin; it is born and produced from feeling. When there is feeling, craving comes to be; when there is no feeling, craving does not come to be.'

"He understands craving, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of craving.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of this feeling**, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does feeling come to be? When what does not exist does feeling not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] feeling: this suffering has contact as its source, contact as its origin; it is born and produced from contact. When there is contact, feeling comes to be; when there is no contact, feeling does not come to be.'

"He understands feeling, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of feeling.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of this contact**, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does contact come to be? When what does not exist does contact not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] contact: this suffering has the six sense bases as its source, the six sense bases as its origin; it is born and produced from the six sense bases. When there are the six sense bases, contact comes to be; when there are no six sense bases, contact does not come to be.'

"He understands contact, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its

cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of contact.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of these six sense bases**, what are their origin, from what are they born and produced? When what exists do the six sense bases come to be? When what does not exist do the six sense bases not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] the six sense bases: this suffering has mentality/materiality as its source, mentality/materiality as its origin; it is born and produced from mentality/materiality. When there is the mentality/materiality, the six sense bases come to be; when there is no mentality/materiality, the six sense bases do not come to be.'

"He understands the six sense bases, their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of the six sense bases.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of this mentality/materiality**, what is their origin, from what are they born and produced? When what exists do mentality/materiality come to be? When what does not exist does mentality/materiality not come to be? What is their origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does mentality/materiality come to be? When what does not exist does mentality/materiality not come to be? When what does not exist does mentality/materiality not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] mentality/materiality: this suffering has consciousness as its source, consciousness as its origin; it is born and produced from consciousness. When there is consciousness, mentality/materiality comes to be; when there is no consciousness, mentality/materiality do not come to be.'

"He understands mentality/materiality, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of mentality/materiality.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of this consciousness**, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does consciousness come to be? When what does not exist does consciousness not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] consciousness this suffering has volitional formations as its source, volitional formations as its origin; it is born and produced from volitional formations. When there are volitional formations, consciousness comes to be; when there are no volitional formations, consciousness does not come to be.'

"He understands consciousness, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of consciousness.

"Then investigating further, he thoroughly investigates thus: '**What is the source of these volitional formations**, what are their origin, from what are they born and produced? When what exists do volitional formations come to be? When what does not exist do volitional formations not come to be?'

"As he thoroughly investigates he understands thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world [headed by] volitional formations this suffering has ignorance as its source, ignorance as its origin; they are born and produced from ignorance. When there is ignorance, volitional formations come to be; when there is no ignorance, volitional formations do not come to be.'

"He understands volitional formations, their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to that is in conformity with its cessation. He practices that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practicing for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of volitional formations.

"Bhikkhus, if a person immersed in ignorance generates a meritorious volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the meritorious; if he generates a demeritorious volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the demeritorious; if he generates an imperturbable volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the imperturbable. But when a bhikkhu has abandoned ignorance and aroused

true knowledge, then, with the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, he does not generate a meritorious volitional formation, or a demeritorious volitional formation, or an imperturbable volitional formation. Since he does not generate or fashion volitional formations, he does not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, he is not agitated. Not being agitated, he personally attains Nibbana. He understands: 'Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.'

"If he feels a pleasant feeling, he understands: 'It is impermanent'; he understands: 'It is not held to'; he understands: 'It is not delighted in.' If he feels a painful feeling, he understands: 'It is impermanent'; he understands: 'It is not held to'; he understands: 'It is not delighted in.' If he feels a neither painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: 'It is impermanent'; he understands: 'It is not held to'; he understands: 'It is not delighted in'.

"When he feels a feeling terminating with the body, he understands: 'I feel a feeling terminating with the body.' When he feels a feeling terminating with life.' He understands: 'I feel a feeling terminating with life'. He understands: 'With the break-up of the body, following the exhaustion of life, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here; mere bodily remains will be left.'

"Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would remove a hot clay pot from a potter's kiln and set it on smooth ground: its heat would be dissipated right there and potsherd would be left. So too, when he feels a feeling terminating with the body, he understands: 'I feel a feeling terminating with the body.' When he feels a feeling terminating with life.' He understands: 'I feel a feeling terminating with life'. He understands: 'With the break-up of the body, following the exhaustion of life, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here; mere bodily remains will be left.'

"What do you think, bhikkhus, can a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed generate a meritorious volitional formation, or a demeritorious volitional formation, or an imperturbable formation?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there are utterly no volitional formations, would consciousness be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no consciousness, would mentality/ materiality be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no mentality/materiality, would the six sense bases be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no six sense bases, would contact be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no contact, would feeling be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no feeling, would craving be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no craving, would clinging be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no clinging, would existence be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no existence, would birth be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there is utterly no birth, would aging-and-death be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

*"Good, good, bhikkhus! It is exactly so and not otherwise! Place faith in me about this, bhikkhus, resolve on this. Be free from perplexity and doubt about this. Just this is the end of suffering."*

*Re-edited*

*March 29, 2005*

SS

Footnote 1: The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya

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